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The Dead Line.

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Whether in the next world a great gulf shall yawn
'Tween Dives in torment and Lazarus in bliss,
'Tis certain that fashion a dead line has drawn
'Twixt Lazarus and Dives in this.

PREFACE.—I have never written a novel, and, at my time of life, busied with the active duties which fall to the lot of a western clergyman, it would be useless for me to attempt such a task. I am about to write of real occurrences in the lives of living people, and occurrences of very recent date; and the reader must, therefore, pardon me if the places referred to in the following narrative are not, by the names I have given them, to be found on reliable maps of Kansas. Fictitious names of persons and places must be excused as but a proper concession to the feelings of the persons who were actors in the scenes I am about to describe.

—GIDEON LAINE.

CHAPTER I.

KATE COTTERELL'S NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

"Surely no man can reflect, without wonder, upon the vicissitudes of human life arising from causes in the highest degree accidental and trifling. If you trace the necessary concatenation of human events a very little way back, you may perhaps discover that a person's very going in or out of a door has been the means of coloring with misery or happiness the remaining current of his life."—Greville.

Cobden, the county seat of a certain county in Kansas, is a "city" of about 2,000 souls. Like many another Kansas town, it is so much of a village that everybody knows everybody else, and knows, or tries to know, all about everybody else, but is, at the same time, so much of a city that social caste is severe, and Mrs. Flotsam "would not be seen on the street" in the afternoon with Mrs. Jetsam, whose flat-irons and gossip she has gone over to borrow in the morning.

Next to Mrs. Raddy, whose husband kept the "Palace store," the leading lady of Cobden society in 1890 was Mrs. Dr. Carlington, who lived in the finest residence in the city, and whose husband not only enjoyed the most fashionable, and therefore, the most lucrative practice in the county, but owned the opera house and held the controlling interest in the Congregational church and dictated the policy of its pulpit. Mrs. Dr. Carlington kept a carriage and a coachman; the latter an "Afro-American" with a strong predilection for statesmanship of the convention-delegate and worker-at-the-polls variety. This colored gentleman's name was "Columbus Washington Blackburn;" but, in the sphere of political and practical activity, this ambitious cognomen was transformed into "Slick" Blackburn, perhaps on account of his disposition to imitate too closely the "practical politics" of better known statesmen. Mrs. Dr. Carlington was a thorough society woman. Her time was altogether devoted to the labor of calling and receiving calls, entertaining and being entertained, doing "church work," managing an orphan asylum and dispensing the sort of cheap charity indulged in by the class known to the rural press as "our charitable ladies." She thoroughly believed the social dogma that heaven invented poverty for the edification, not to say glorification, of the "upper classes;" and, regarding the scriptural remark—"The poor ye have always with you"—as a positive command, it was, in her opinion, the rankest blasphemy to talk of abolishing poverty. She had a good heart as society hearts go, but conventionality had rendered it rudimentary. She would have been an infidel had she supposed for a moment that the Almighty considered himself the father of the lower classes in the same sense as of people in good society. She was neither beautiful nor young; but he would have been a daring wretch indeed who would have allowed her to suspect he doubted she was both. Mrs. Dr. Carlington was as dignified as dull people usually are, and with frigid smiles "gave her little senate laws" which it did not dare disregard.

Dr. Carlington himself was rather handsome. He was also a man of good intellect, was well educated, and had a cordial manner and a frank, good-hearted air about him which did his patients more good than his prescriptions, and made everybody in the city his friend. He went but rarely into society, and never entered the opera house to witness a theatrical performance, except when Mrs. Carlington was out of the city. Although naturally liberal minded and tolerant in religion, he had never thought on theological subjects, and so believed his church creed, as does many a busy man, because he had been brought up that way and it had never occurred to him that church creeds could be debated. He had heard in a general way of the existence of such persons as Ingersoll and Bradlaugh, and his preacher had sometimes alluded to Paine and Voltaire; but beyond the vague notion that they were "infidels," he had not the slightest apprehension of their views. Nor did he care to inquire about such matters. He was too busy making money and gathering it in to waste any time on trifles. In short, he was an average good-natured, selfish man; physically vigorous and industrious, but mentally and morally indolent.

About six months previous to the opening of our narrative, Kate Cotterell, a farmer's daughter, had entered the Carlington household as a domestic. Her business was to help in the kitchen, wait on the table and act as nurse for the infant Carlington heir. During that six months her mistress' conversation with her new servant had been limited to giving orders and finding fault. Mrs. Carlington acted toward her help on the theory that "familiarity breeds contempt" (in which there was in her case deep wisdom, perhaps), and was firmly of the opinion that "servants must be made to know their place." However, she paid fairly good wages and her help was well housed and fed. One point which she had frequent occasion to impress upon Kate was that a servant was not expected to have literary leanings but *was* expected to let the books in the library alone, as well as the periodicals which sometimes found their way into the house. Mrs. Carlington herself observed this precept. *She* did not meddle with books, nor with any but "fashion" periodicals. She had not the slightest knowledge, nor had the doctor, what the library contained. A book seller had "supplied" it in gross, and not a single accession had been made to it since. But the bindings were all fine, and a library helps "set off" a house. Why should a mere servant, and she a common farmer's daughter only sixteen years old, wish to meddle with books? She might ruin the bindings, or worse still, might lose a valuable volume and be unable to replace it. But Kate had an insatiable thirst for knowledge which had never been gratified at home; and the proximity of "a whole library," which really contained an excellent selection, was a temptation too great for effective resistance. Books were stealthily taken up stairs in day time and concealed under her pillow for use at night. They were not missed, of course, but Kate would get incautious at times and be caught in the very act of taking a book out; then the "touch not" prohibition would be sternly reiterated.

"Sam Cotterell," as his neighbors called him, lived on a farm about nine miles out of town. Kate was his only daughter. She longed to go to college, and as he was too poor to send her there, he had reluctantly consented that she might go to the city and "work out" in order to earn enough to enable her to study the common branches and become a country school teacher, with the hope of saving, in the latter occupation, money sufficient to carry out her ambitious project of acquiring a college education. This distant hope was very real to Kate, and enabled her to bear the mortifications she had to endure in the Carlington home. Not, however, without much smothered indignation and many a tear; for she was not only sensitive, as people of mental temperament are wont to be, but she instinctively felt her natural superiority to the woman whose submissive slave she was forced to be.

Kate had a warm, loving, girlish heart, as well as a bright mind, and, with her intelligent, gentle and mobile face, her jet black hair and eyes, rich complexion, full red lips and perfect figure, she was the most beautiful girl, in or out of society, to be met with in Cobden. Whether she was aware of this I, of course, am unable to say; but she was a young girl, and there were mirrors in the Carlington house. Her manners, too, were lady like and winning—much more so than those of the society young women who ignored her existence. There were times, when she had grown very weary, that she was disposed to give up her project, for the way seemed so long, the struggle so hard; but she always conquered the weakness and persevered toward the college goal by the country school house route.

One day an event occurred which changed this program somewhat. As she was on her knees scrubbing the floor of the front porch (for Mrs. Dr. Carlington was an almost fiendishly clean house-keeper) a run-away team came tearing down the street, and all Cobden was out seeking to calm the frightened horses by running before them and behind them with a multiplicity of yells and insane gesticulations. Every dog in the town was having his day, and the "hoodlums" were in ecstacy. In point of exciting interest and of a general diffusion of personal importance, nothing but a fire can compare with a runaway. If the reader has never been present at such an entertainment in a city like Cobden, no amount of description could give him a just conception of the spectacle.

Kate grew faint with horror, as, hearing the clatter, she looked up and beheld the terrible sight which greeted her sympathetic eyes. An old man was being dragged face downward over the street, his right leg having become